

Reaching out for the true meaning of Christmas

Christmas is many things to many people. But the research and planning department found that more than the gifts, goodies and merrymaking, the essence of the season lies in the kindness and caring generated to those less fortunate than ourselves.

So, instead of the traditional office party/gift exchange, the department of about 20 opted to collect money to buy toys, clothing and food for a needy family of eight residing in Troy.

Barb Machiniak was responsible for locating the family and purchasing all the goods. "I called the City of Troy and they directed me to Troy People Concerned who put me in touch with the family," Barb says.

Jon Hartman, formerly manager financial planning and recently promoted to corporate financial management analyst, participated in the program.

"Like most departments, we had always had employees buying gifts for the bosses and the bosses buying gifts for the secretaries," Jon explains. "This year (1982) we had everyone pitch in what they normally would have spent on gifts to buy food, clothes and toys for this family."

According to Christal Hawley, financial planning, the amount collected was approximately \$350. Clothes were bought for all and each child received a toy (the youngest ones received two toys). After the clothes and toys were purchased, there was about \$130 left to buy the food which included a lot of canned goods and of course, a turkey.

Barb, Andrew Noskas, Mary Connelly, all of financial planning and Rick Machiniak, maintenance, delivered the glad tidings to the family.

"We delivered the gifts on Thursday night (Dec. 23) but the kids weren't there," Barb says. "The mother didn't want the children to know, because some of them still believe in Santa."

John Patek, who helped wrap the gifts said, "They all got underwear. I guess that was probably the most memorable thing about wrapping the gifts. I also wrapped some toys, little trucks and things. The children must have been pretty young, because I wrapped some real little mountain climbing type boots."

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Tradition plays a big part in the Christmas season and for the CSD, data processing departments, donating food and gifts to needy families has been a tradition for the past seven years.

This year, six families, found through the Salvation Army, were aided through the generous efforts of over 300 employees in CSD and data processing.

Sandy Johnson and Renee Dudlets, new job development, were instrumental in getting the ball rolling this year.

"Everyone gets so involved and is so helpful," Sandy says. "On the last day before we made our deliveries, a lady came in from some department and I didn't even know her. But she wanted to help wrap packages. So we put her to work!"

The families each received at least four boxes of food plus a ham, some garnering more, depending on family size. There were 26 children among the families and each received toys. A money collection was also taken and the pot grew to over \$800 which was divided up equally among the families.

A caravan of eight cars and trucks set out the Wednesday before Christmas to deliver the goods. One truck was filled to the brim with colorfully wrapped packages and people at traffic lights would roll their windows down and ask the driver if he was Santa Claus and where was he going with all the packages!

On one stop, Sandy helped deliver gifts to a young couple with two small boys. The father was ill and given only six months to live.

"You get so involved with the families," Sandy said. "I wanted to stay and open presents with them. I didn't want to leave."

A look often says so much more than words as was the case at many of the homes.

"The expressions on people's faces is sort of unbelievable," Sandy says. "One woman just stood there and looked. She couldn't believe that all these people were at her home to give her things. You could see the tears in her eyes. She was so excited."

A group of 10 employees who dubbed themselves the Christmas Committee was in charge of organizing the food drive. The committee included: Sandy and Renee, Lorraine Walton, CSD; Kim Briskey, CSD; Lili Grochowski, CSD; Carolyn Nelson, data entry; Barbara Spratt, data entry; Diane Spybrook, systems assurance; Grace Hall, micrographics and Greg Franke, stockroom, data processing.

They are already thinking about next year and the possibility of helping even more families in the name of tradition.

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The woman and two small boys in front are members of one of the needy families that were aided by CSD, data processing. The boy in the middle is a neighbor who was there to share in the family's excitement.